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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000141

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TAGS: PREL TU KV MW

SUBJECT: TURKEY: MFA BALKANS CHIEF DISCUSSES KOSOVO,  
MONTENEGRIN VISIT

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: GOT officials tell us that Turkey is ready to recognize Kosovo independence. Timing, however, is contingent on EU solidarity. Should a majority of EU countries, including key members, immediately recognize Kosovo, Turkey will rapidly follow suit. MFA Balkans Department Head Ilhan Saygili reported the Albanian government has asked Turkey to play a leadership role in soliciting Kosovo recognition at the upcoming Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting in Cairo. On several occasions, Turkey has secured OIC member support for Kosovo initiatives, but Albania's refusal to "sync up" with other issues of importance to the OIC, specifically on Palestine, has greatly reduced Tirana's creditability within the organization. Turkey is unlikely to risk becoming involved in intra-OIC politics by taking the stage with Albania in Cairo, but could play a significant role in encouraging Kosovo recognition by the Islamic world if properly entreated to do so. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (C) MFA Balkans Department Head Ilhan Saygili affirmed recent statements made by PM Erdogan that Turkey will recognize an independent Kosovo. Whether Turkey will be in the first or second wave of recognitions depends on EU solidarity. If a majority of EU nations, including key members like France and Germany, are quick to recognize Kosovo, Turkey will immediately follow suit. If the EU fails to achieve significant consensus, Turkey will delay its recognition. Reflecting Turkish reservations concerning Serbia's expected reaction to Kosovo independence, Saygili reported the GOT has encouraged the new Kosovo government to include in its declaration of independence language an assurance that the Government of Kosovo aims to maintain regional stability. Based on conversations with Serbian officials, the GOT believes such language could provide the Serbs with some political cover.

¶3. (C) Saygili reported the Albanian government formally asked the GOT to take a leadership role in advocating for Kosovo recognition at the upcoming OIC parliamentary conference in Cairo, January 25-31. Without committing, the GOT advised Tirana to draft a proposal and submit it to the OIC for discussion. The Turks also suggested the Albanians become "more forthcoming" on issues of importance to the OIC.

Saygili explained that many OIC members resent Albania's habitual abstention on referenda related to Palestine.

¶4. (C) In the highest-level Montenegrin visit to date, Foreign Minister Milan Rochen met with President Gul, Foreign Minister Babacan, and Parliamentary Speaker Toptan during a January 16 trip to Ankara. Saygili reported discussions focused on enhancing bilateral relations and regional issues such as Kosovo. Foreign Ministers Rochen and Babacan signed three documents: a cooperative agreement between Foreign Ministries; a protocol for training Montenegrin diplomats at the Turkish Academy of Foreign Service; and a mutual lifting of visa regimes. On the issue of Kosovo, Rochen told Babacan that Montenegro "does not have the luxury of being in a hurry for recognition" due to its inherent relationship with Serbia.

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